University of Sheffield | Research, Partnerships & Innovation

Guide to the thesis examination process for supervisors of postgraduate researchers

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INTRODUCTION

This document provides information and guidance for supervisors of postgraduate research students who are approaching thesis submission. It is intended to support supervisors with their responsibilities during the latter stages of their student's studies. This document complements the Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes, which provides more detailed guidance and policies.

1. Appointment of examiners

1.1 The supervisor is responsible for nominating suitable examiners, who must then be formally appointed by the faculty. Examiners should be appointed well in advance of the thesis being submitted, to avoid delaying the subsequent examination process. Supervisors should ensure that the examiners will be available to read and examine the student's thesis within ten weeks of their expected submission date. Supervisors should refer to the Criteria for the appointment of examiners document.

1.2 Verbal or written agreement of the examiners to undertake this task should be obtained prior to their formal nomination, which should be made on the appropriate form. Once authorised by the PGR Lead, the completed nomination form, together with any additional information (e.g. CVs, lists of publications), should then be returned to Research, Partnerships and Innovation, who will arrange for it to be considered by the relevant faculty. Further guidance on the viva examination is available at https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/rpi/pgr/examination/viva

1.3 Late appointment of examiners (i.e. after the thesis has been submitted) will result in a delay in the overall examination process and can cause considerable distress and inconvenience to the candidate, particularly to overseas candidates who may struggle with visa issues which can be problematic and expensive.

1.4 At least two examiners are appointed for each thesis presented for the degree. For student candidates there will be an internal and an external examiner. The internal examiner is a member of the University's academic staff and is additionally responsible for making the necessary arrangements for the oral examination and ensuring that the University's procedures are followed correctly. The external examiner is a senior academic or professional/practitioner in the relevant subject area of the thesis and is appointed from outside the University. Both examiners must have examined at least three times before and/or supervised at least one student to completion.

1.5 For most University Staff candidates, two external examiners are appointed. In cases where two external examiners have been appointed, an internal coordinator will be nominated to oversee the arrangements for the oral and to attend the oral examination to ensure that the University's procedures are followed. The coordinator should be an academic member of staff who has had prior experience of the examination process but should not be the supervisor.

1.6 In the case of a University Staff candidate holding a non-established post arising from external financing (e.g. Marie Cure) or an established post within the NHS and an Honorary University Contract, one internal and one external examiner should be appointed. Both

examiners must have examined at least three times before and/or supervised at least one student to completion.

1.7 Where no suitably qualified internal examiner exists or is willing to act, the appointment of a second external examiner is an option that Faculties may exercise.

1.8 Examiners should have no previous association with the candidate or direct involvement with their research project and must declare an interest in any past or planned future connections with the candidate. This includes, but is not limited to, current or former academic supervision or other forms of academic collaboration, pastoral relationships, family relationships, friendship, employment, or professional connections. In cases of uncertainty, the PGR Support Team in Research, Partnerships and Innovation (RPI) should be consulted. It is the responsibility of the candidate to advise the supervisor and RPI before the point of formal nomination if they have any previous or planned future connections with one or both nominated examiners.

1.9 The supervisor should advise the candidate of the names of their examiners at the earliest opportunity.

1.10 It is the responsibility of Research, Partnerships and Innovation to write to the examiners, once their nomination has been formally approved by the appropriate Faculty Officer, regarding the details of their appointment and providing the necessary forms and a copy of the Guidance Notes for Examiners.

1.11 In the case of a resubmitted thesis, the original examiners will normally be required to undertake the re-examination.

2. Thesis submission and despatch

2.1 It is recommended that the supervisor will have read the final draft of the thesis and be in agreement with the candidate about the appropriate moment to submit the thesis. However, it is ultimately the candidate's responsibility to decide when to submit their thesis.

2.2 In the case of a first submission and a full resubmission, the candidate must submit one electronic copy of the thesis via Google form to Research, Partnerships and Innovation following the procedure outlined at https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/rpi/pgr/examination/submission and inform their supervisor when they have done so.

2.3 In addition, the candidate must also upload an electronic copy of the final thesis to Turnitin for a similarity check (this applies to both first submissions and full resubmissions). The internal examiner or internal coordinator will then check the Turnitin report for any evidence of academic misconduct, e.g. plagiarism. The Turnitin report will be sent to the internal examiner or coordinator to check by the school's PGR administrator.

2.4 Once confirmation has been received that the thesis originality report is acceptable, Research, Partnerships and Innovation will normally despatch the thesis to the examiners

within three working days, along with a copy of the Guidance Notes for Examiners and the examiners' joint report and preliminary forms.

2.5 Please note that uploading to Turnitin alone does not constitute formal thesis submission to the University. The thesis must also be submitted to Research, partnerships and Innovation, as outlined in 2.2.

2.6 Under no circumstances should a candidate or supervisor attempt to send a copy of the thesis direct to the examiners, as there is no way to verify that its content is identical to the hard copy submitted to Research, Partnerships and Innovation.

3. The viva

3.1 It is the responsibility of the internal examiner or internal coordinator to make all necessary arrangements for the viva, not the supervisor or the candidate.

3.2 The candidate's supervisor should be available for consultation by the candidate immediately following the viva to offer advice and support. If that is not possible, they should ensure that another appropriate member of staff is nominated for this role and that the candidate knows who this is and where to find them.

3.3 In the case of candidates with additional support requirements for the viva, advice and guidance can be obtained from the University's Disability and Dyslexia Support Service.

3.4 At the request of the candidate, the primary supervisor may exceptionally attend the viva, subject to the prior agreement of the candidate and examiners. If the primary supervisor does attend the examination, they must enter and leave the viva with the candidate and should not be present during any deliberations over the outcome of the examination.

3.5 Examiners should not contact the candidate directly or through the supervisor or a third party on matters relating to the content of a thesis before the viva.

3.6 It is the responsibility of the candidate to attend the viva on the specified date, and at the time and location, as arranged by the internal examiner/coordinator.

3.7 It is the responsibility of the candidate to inform the internal examiner, the supervisor, and the appropriate Research Degree Support Officer in Research, Partnerships and Innovation if they are unable to attend the viva, and to explain the reason for their non-attendance. Unauthorised absence from the examination will result in a fail.

4. Outcomes of the viva

4.1 Examiners must clearly indicate their recommendation concerning the award (or non-award) of the degree. Here is a summary of the permitted recommendations for doctoral degrees:

- The degree is awarded without the need for any corrections to the thesis.
- The degree will be awarded once specified minor corrections have been satisfactorily completed. The candidate has three months to complete these.
- The degree will be awarded once specified major corrections have been satisfactorily completed. The candidate has six months to complete these.

- The degree should not be awarded at present; the examiners would like the candidate to undergo a second viva, without the need for changes to their thesis, before making a final decision.
- The degree should not be awarded at present. The candidate is invited to resubmit for a PhD. The examiners request substantial changes to the thesis, and the candidate has one year to complete these. The examiners must also decide whether a second viva is needed.
- The degree of MPhil should be awarded instead, subject to minor changes to the title page, cover and content. Examiners must provide details of the reasoning behind this decision.
- The degree should not be awarded at present. The candidate is invited to resubmit for an MPhil. The examiners request substantial changes to the thesis, and the candidate has one year to complete these. The examiners must also decide whether a second viva is needed.
- The degree should not be awarded; the candidate has failed. Examiners must provide details of the reasoning behind this decision.

4.2 For the degrees of EdD, EngD/PhD with Integrated MSc or PGDip they could also recommend:

- The degree should not be awarded, but the candidate should receive the taught Master's degree for the programme. Examiners must provide details of the reasoning behind this decision.

4.3 For the degree of DClinPsy, they could also recommend:

- The degree should not be awarded, but the candidate can submit an entirely new thesis for DClinPsy with a second viva. They have one year to prepare this.

4.4 For the degree of MPhil, the first four options above are available together with the option of a fail.

5. Minor or major corrections

5.1 Candidates required to make minor corrections to their thesis will be granted three months to complete these. Candidates required to make major corrections to their thesis will be granted six months. These timescales apply regardless of whether they are registered as full-time or part-time This period starts from the date on which they receive details from the examiners of the required corrections. The examiners should ensure that the candidate receives their list of minor or major corrections within two weeks of the viva.

5.2 Please note that Research, Partnerships and Innovation does not formally inform the student of the outcome of their examination at this point or send them the required corrections; this is the responsibility of the examiners.

5.3 It is the responsibility of the supervisor to provide continuity of support to the candidate where minor or major corrections to the thesis are required.

5.4 Where a student is undertaking minor or major corrections to their thesis, they should submit a copy of the corrected thesis directly to the designated examiner, via email, for the examiner to confirm that they are happy that all the required corrections have been satisfactorily undertaken.

6. Resubmission and re-examination of a thesis

6.1 The candidate will be granted one year in which to resubmit their thesis, regardless of whether they are registered as full-time or part-time. This year commences from the date the candidate is formally notified of this outcome by Research, Partnerships and Innovation.

6.2 Once the recommendation for resubmission has been approved by the Faculty, Research, Partnerships and Innovation will write to the candidate to inform them of the outcome and will send them a copy of the examiners' report, including the required corrections.

6.3 Where a candidate is required to resubmit their thesis, this should be treated as a formal re-examination. As such, there should be no unauthorised contact between the candidate and the examiners prior to the re-examination.

6.4 The candidate or supervisor should not send a copy of the thesis to the examiners, either informally or for comment, prior to the formal resubmission.

6.5 The candidate must resubmit their thesis to Research, Partnerships and Innovation following the same procedures that apply to first submissions, including uploading the thesis to Turnitin for a similarity check.

6.6 Once a candidate's thesis has been resubmitted and the Turnitin originality report has been approved, Research, Partnerships and Innovation will despatch it to the examiners, along with the relevant re-examination report forms and a copy of the Guidance Notes for Examiners.

6.7 It is the responsibility of the supervisor to provide continuity of support to the candidate where corrections to the thesis are required.

7 Resubmission outcomes

7.1 Examiners must clearly indicate their recommendation concerning the award (or non-award) of the degree. Here is a summary of the permitted recommendations for doctoral degrees following resubmission of a thesis:

- The degree is awarded without the need for any corrections to the thesis.
- The degree will be awarded once specified minor or major corrections have been completed.
- The degree of MPhil should be awarded instead, subject to minor changes to the title page, cover and content. Examiners must provide details of the reasoning behind this decision.
- The degree should not be awarded; the candidate has failed. Examiners must provide details of the reasoning behind this decision.

7.2 For the degrees of EdD, EngD/PhD with Integrated MSc or PGDip, they could also recommend:

- The degree should not be awarded, but the candidate should receive the taught Master's degree for the programme. Examiners must provide details of the reasoning behind this decision.

7.3 For the degree MPhil only the first two options plus the option of a fail are available.

8 Award of degree

8.1 Formal notification of the award of the degree may only be provided by Research, Partnerships and Innovation, following approval by the relevant Faculty.

8.2 Awards will be withheld until the candidate has paid any outstanding tuition fees and tuition-related fees to the University, deposited an electronic Library copy of the thesis (an eThesis), and completed any requirements of the Doctoral Development Programme.

8.3 Following formal approval of the recommendation by the Vice-Chancellor, the candidate will receive by email an award letter and a copy of the examiners' reports. This comprises the joint report agreed by both examiners, as well as preliminary reports written independently before the viva. A copy is also sent to the student's school.

8.4 The reports can be released by Research, Partnerships and Innovation only, not by the examiners or faculty.

9 Contacts

9.1 The PGR Support Team in Research, Partnerships and Innovation (RPI) is responsible for research student progression and assessment, including the following aspects of the examination process:

- Appointment of examiners, including faculty approval.
- Thesis submission and despatch of theses to examiners.
- Processing of examiners' report forms, including faculty approval.
- Requests to extend the time limit for submitting/resubmitting a thesis.
- Processing of examiners' fees and expenses.

9.2 General enquiries regarding any aspect of the examination process, including payment of fees and expenses, should be directed to pgr-enquiries@sheffield.ac.uk.

Faculty-specific enquiries should be directed to the following:

- Arts & Humanities: pgrarts@sheffield.ac.uk
- Engineering: pgreng@sheffield.ac.uk
- Health: pgrhealth@sheffield.ac.uk
- Science: pgrsci@sheffield.ac.uk
- Social Sciences: pgrsocsci@sheffield.ac.uk